

**CONGRESSMAN SHERWOOD BOEHLERT (R-NY)**  
**SPEECH TO CLEAN CITIES CONFERENCE**  
**June 2, 1998**

It's a pleasure to be with you this afternoon because I feel a close personal connection to the Clean Cities program -- and not just for policy reasons. I'm proud to say that Assistant Secretary Reicher -- who is doing such an excellent job of overseeing the program -- grew up in my Congressional District, which also is home to the manufacturing facilities of Orion Bus, a leading manufacture of alternative fueled buses. So I like to think that upstate New York is not only participating in the Clean Cities program, but is enabling it to exist. I guess I am just once again proving the adage that "all politics is local."

I'm also pleased to be here because this is an auspicious time to discuss clean fuels policy. Just a little more than a week ago, Congress passed a comprehensive transportation bill -- now dubbed "TEA-21" -- and the President will sign it within the next week. As you know, this bill sported different acronyms at different points in its gestation -- ISTEA, ISTEA-II, BESTEA and now TEA-21, but I like to think of it as "Green Tea." TEA-21 is "Green Tea" because we actually managed to craft what most would think of as an oxymoron -- an environmentally friendly transportation bill.

It did not always look like things would turn out that way. When work on the bill began -- and when environmental groups joined to form the Surface Transportation Policy Project -- things looked rather bleak. The folks from the "asphalt jungle" looked like they had all the money, all the sympathy, all the clout. The most environmentalists -- inside and outside the Congress -- thought we could hope for was to salvage some scraps of existing programs.

But what Congress actually passed makes for a much happier story. Chairmen Bud Shuster and John Chafee produced a balanced bill that provides funding for highways without scanting mass transit, alternative fuels or other transportation alternatives. That's a credit to them, and that's a credit to all of us, who pushed hard to maintain and expand environmental transportation programs.

So what did we end up with? Most notably, the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) program -- so important to alternative fuel efforts-- was increased significantly. Under the 1991 ISTEA bill, CMAQ spending amounted to about \$933 million a year. Under TEA-21, spending will rise to about \$1.5 billion a year. More counties will be eligible for CMAQ for a good reason: more of them will be out of attainment with clean air standards because the standards for ozone and particulates are being tightened -- a move I supported.

In a small concession, states will have the option of shifting half of the incremental funding for CMAQ to other programs -- that is, half of the amount they receive over and above what they had received under the 1991 bill. But that could prove to be a blessing in disguise, if it forces local officials (like many of you in this room) to redouble your efforts to build support for CMAQ at the state level. We need to encourage more state transportation planners to integrate environmental concerns into their thinking rather than to view environmentalism as an opposing theory of life.

TEA-21 also increases the set-aside for the Transportation Enhancements program, which will grow by 40 percent to reach about \$630 million a year. That money can be used for such projects as the construction of bike trails and the renovation of rail stations.

Programs that are more explicitly targeted toward alternative fuels also get a big boost under TEA-21. Senator D'Amato and I fought hard to see that municipalities would have funds to buy, fuel and maintain alternative fuel transit buses. This is vital because conventional buses, whatever their other benefits, provide no advantage over cars in terms of fuel efficiency and emissions per passenger mile.

Certainly, public authorities ought to be actively contributing to our national goals of reducing fuel consumption and pollution. This is especially true in the case of transit buses since proven technology is already in the market.

TEA-21 provides \$200 million a year in formula and other grants to enable municipalities to purchase low-emission buses and build fueling facilities. Eligible technologies include compressed natural gas, liquefied natural gas, biodiesel, electric, hybrid-electric and fuel cells. At least 5 percent of the money each year must be spent on electric or hybrid-electric buses -- an important provision because we want federal money to create a market for the newest and cleanest technologies.

In addition, money will continue to be available to develop new technologies. \$50 million a year will be used to fund research consortia to develop and promote cleaner, more efficient vehicles. This is a continuation of a program that the Department of Defense was dropping that will now be moved to the Department of Transportation.

Finally, I fought successfully to give states the authority to permit Inherently Low Emission Vehicles (ILEVs) to use High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes. This seems such an obvious, common-sensical step to take that we were surprised how much work it was to get it accepted. But it always takes energy to overcome inertia. Giving drivers of ILEVs the ability to use HOV lanes regardless of how many people are in the car will create an additional incentive to use low-emission vehicles.

Now, with such an outstanding list of successes in ISTEA, all of us who support such initiatives might be tempted to rest on our laurels. But that would be a serious mistake. On a practical level, TEA-21 is an unalloyed success that will provide billions of dollars for alt-fuel and other environmental efforts. But that success should not be read as a sign that the entire Congress has gotten religion on the nexus between transportation and environment, or has even begun to think much about alternative fueled vehicles.

TEA-21 is an unusual bill, to put it mildly -- in some ways a throwback to an earlier Congressional age. It is largely a non-ideological, broadly popular bill with something for everybody. Frankly, Members voted on the final version barely having seen a summary, and even those who drafted the measure are still picking their way through it, discovering errors of omission and commission.

The successes I have enumerated are indeed a sign of the strength of the environmental community and the leg-work of groups like the Electric Transportation Coalition.

But when it comes to alt-fuel programs the bill is mostly a sign of what a small number of committed Members can get done when there is plenty of money available and little opposition to, or even awareness of these matters on the part of others. That's hardly the standard context for policy-making these days. So we still have plenty of work to do.

What do most Members of Congress think about alt-fuel vehicles? I hazard to guess that the answer is "nothing." What do most Members know about the Energy Policy Act of 1992 (EPACT) that created the Clean Cities program? Again, nothing -- it was passed before a large percentage of them came to Congress.

Now, I don't say this as an attack on my colleagues. Not so long ago, I would have counted myself as among those who thought and knew nothing about alternative vehicles, despite my environmental activism. As I often say, five years ago or so, the term "alternative vehicle" would have meant nothing more to me than deciding whether to take my car or my wife's. It was only when I began to understand the potential the alt-fuel industry had for creating jobs in my Congressional District that I began to pay more attention to the entire issue. As I said at the outset, all politics truly is local.

So the fact that alt fuel vehicles are not on the "radar screen" of most Members is not their fault; it's our fault. We need to do a better job of creating a place for these vehicles in the "marketplace of ideas" just as much as we need to create a place for them in the commercial marketplace. Indeed, the two goals are inextricably linked.

In fact, the marketplace of ideas is in some ways more critical. Alt-fuel vehicles present an unusual problem in the history of technology. The problem is this: most new transportation technologies have had obvious, immediate benefits for individuals, but dubious benefits or troubling implications for society. Railroads and automobiles largely followed this pattern.

But alternative vehicles reverse this historic pattern. The benefits to society are quite clear; the advantages for individuals are still a bit murky. So we have to do a much better job of underscoring the benefits to society, while the technologists continue to make these vehicles ever more advantageous to individuals.

Making the case for an urgent societal need for alternative vehicles should not be too difficult. We are far more dependent on foreign oil than we were at the time of the energy crisis in the 1970s, and the world has hardly become a more stable place. Too few Americans -- including Members of Congress -- are aware of that striking fact now that gasoline is cheaper per gallon than bottled water.

Moreover, despite the enormous strides made in reducing tailpipe emissions by 90 percent, transportation still accounts for a major portion of our pollution problems. In 1995, transportation was responsible for 78 percent of the nation's carbon monoxide emissions, 45 percent of NO<sub>x</sub> emissions, 37 percent of lead, 44 percent of VOCs, 32 percent of carbon dioxide and 26 percent of particulates. Not a pretty picture. And with the growth in the aggregate number of miles driven by Americans, no level of reduction in the emissions of standard vehicles is going to solve the problem.

I mentioned carbon dioxide, and concerns about climate change, of course, only strengthen the case for alternative vehicles. The New York Times just last week had a front-page article about how catalytic converters are contributing to the climate change problem by producing nitrous oxide, a more powerful greenhouse gas than CO2. That is no laughing matter because it points up how even cleaner burning cars contribute to global climate change.

Still, politically, climate change is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it underscores how vital alt-fuel technology is for the nation's future. On the other, the climate change issue is so controversial in its own right, that linking alt-fuels to climate change hardly strengthens the political case for alternative vehicles.

In fact, for some Members, the association with climate change is tainting programs that they have long supported. For example, renewable energy and conservation programs that have been somewhat controversial but have managed to survive for more than 20 years are now under renewed attack because the Administration has linked them to climate change. I'd hate to see the same thing happen to alternative vehicle programs.

I say this despite what is frankly the totally illogical reasoning behind these attacks. The idea seems to be that a program that results in greater U.S. energy independence, wiser use of resources, and reduced pollution can't be supported if it inadvertently also reduces greenhouse gas emissions. That's an awfully odd sort of guilt by association.

But discretion is the better part of valor and, for now -- given all the other arguments for clean cities and other alt-fuel programs -- I wouldn't push the climate change point too boldly. We can work simultaneously, but separately to build understanding of the value and state of alternative fuel technologies, on the one hand; and the state of scientific knowledge on climate change, on the other.

So, in short, we all have our work cut out for us. Thanks to TEA-21, funding for alt-fuel projects will be healthy for the next six years, but we need to use that time to build broader and deeper support for alt-fuel programs. TEA-21 itself should help do that by demonstrating how successful such programs can be.

I pledge to continue doing all I can here in Congress. But we will only succeed if all of you make the case back home. That's your challenge. We will only make progress with these new-fangled technologies if we engage in some old-fashioned politics. Thank you.